



THE IBS NETWORK AGM
6:15 - 7pm Monday 15th January 2021
Virtual Meeting held via Teams

Present: Trustees: Simon Smale (SS), Dan Laver, Jenny Brown (JB), Alison Reid (AR) CEO, Non Exec. Advisory Board members: Gillian Goddard, Matthew Chaddock, Lauren White. Core team: Liz Champion, Kelsey Law (minutes). Members observing: Maureen.

Apologies: Janet Tomlin, Sam Yardy

Welcome and Introduction

AR welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded those taking part that only Trustees and Advisory Board members were able to ask questions and vote. Community members who were there to observe were able to ask questions in the chat area, and Liz would compile all the questions, and would share the questions and answers in the next week or so.

Formal Welcome to AGM

SS declared the formal AGM open and welcomed all those attending. **SS** thanked everyone for taking the time.

Previous minutes

Minutes from the last AGM were accepted as accurate.

Chair's Report

SS We are emerging from something of an uncertain period; I think it remains challenging in terms of the operating environment for a small charity in the setting of the pandemic and the recovery from the pandemic. The charity's core team have had to think about how we work, and are considering more flexible ways of working. Nevertheless, the core aim of the charity remains the same. To support those living with IBS and enable them where possible to better self-manage.

In terms of the year gone, Jan 20-Jan 21, demand has hugely increased over the period of the pandemic and that has been reflected in an increase in membership. However, it is not just the membership that has increased, the demand on the charity has increased significantly. In the context of the pandemic, the core team has had to work hard to ensure

that every call is answered. Hats off to Alison, Sam, Liz and Kelsey for their commitment. As I know there has been a huge amount of requests from members; very reasonable requests in the context of all that has been going on in the last year or two, the team managed that with a stiff upper lip and got on with the job. I would like to extend my thanks to them. I would also like to extend my thanks to the huge number of clinicians that help us in delivering clinical support to the core team and the wider membership. We are really grateful for their contribution and for the volunteer clinicians who support the charity.

In terms of the digitisation programme, which we had proposed in 2019 as one of our key indicators of success in 2020/21. The pandemic has made us unable to put in the hours towards delivering the digitisation plan, but at the same time the pandemic has enabled us to think about what that might look like and consider some of the technology that will help us make it happen. I think it has been really hard to deliver on that, given the burdens from the pandemic. I would reflect that actually, in many ways the pandemic may enable our digitisation in the long term. We will be picking that up over the coming months and that will be one of our key objectives going forwards, so we can more efficiently deliver the service that we aspire to deliver to our members. One thing the pandemic has shown is how rapidly technology can be adopted, for wider benefit when the need arises. I think there is a real opportunity there in terms of us moving forward with the digitisation programme.

In terms of achievements in the previous year, again great thanks are extended to the core team, who remain central to the delivery of the service that the charity provides. An Admin Assistant joined them briefly earlier in the year but unfortunately, they had to be made redundant later in the year; an outcome of the pandemic.

Briefly reviewing what we achieved over the year. The membership, not surprisingly, as I previously mentioned, has increased significantly over the year and not only that, one of the indicators suggests that retention is improving compared to previous years. That's a really positive outcome, as we knew that retention of members was a challenge.

The current services to members include the telephone helpline staffed by IBS trained nurses, a website that includes ask the experts, a 'Can't Wait' card and international travel card, Gut Reaction the quarterly magazine, and a growing library of gut friendly recipes, they also get various members offers; you will have seen offers for probiotics and access to the online forum and frequent communication from the team as and when indicated as well as the access to the advice and support of trusted professionals including dietitians, pharmacists and gastroenterologists. I think that's really valuable.

In terms of support groups, at the start of the pandemic we had 13 active support groups but at that stage only one of them was delivering virtually. We had aspired to get support groups set up in cities and towns all over the country, in reality we struggled with that, but we are looking at how we can deliver support groups virtually to a wider audience going forward. This is perhaps an opportunity to look at some efficiencies and how we can do things without necessarily having hundreds of support groups all over the country.

In terms of communication, there's been a lot of stuff from social media and on the news, I know Alison's been on various interviews on television and there has been various articles in

professional and national newspapers. The website remains a big portal of access to people, we averaged 51,000 hits a month through the website. That's a credit to the team, and the website is updated regularly which again draws people in. Unfortunately, most of the events in terms of wider communication with people 'beyond the wall' were cancelled over the last year, and I think we have to look at what events we go to going forward, and that is something we are doing. Obviously we continue to build relationships with corporate sponsors in terms of pharma and other relationships. Alison is working really hard to develop both the existing relationships and to extend new ones.

In terms of research, which is one thing that people want the charity to get more involved in, we have this year collaborated with a number of research groups from institutions, in supporting them to survey people and to undertake research into IBS. I think that is a positive step going forward.

Looking at the future, I think it is fair to say that financially we remain challenged. We continue to operate with at least six months in our reserve. But I think it would be an untruth to say we weren't concerned about the future financial wellbeing of the charity, however we continue to raise revenue, obviously the broad areas for our activity are membership, but in terms of where we're developing relationships and see ourselves developing relationships in the future, there's 'Wellbeing at work' we are developing partners and hopefully a network of employers, where we can support people who are at work with IBS. Obviously often, in the workplace that can be difficult because people face challenges with toilet access and toilet breaks and with the disruption that IBS causes to lives and working lives. That has not always been looked on sympathetically or positively whether by the employers or by the colleagues. It is often the case that people belittle the symptoms that people living with IBS experience. We will continue to campaign strongly and actively, that this is a very real pathology.

We are continuing to build relationships with corporate partners, particularly in pharma in the commercial health care world, financially that is important for the charity, because a significant portion of our revenue comes from that. With that revenue, the proposal is that we continue to look at how we digitise our offering and we talked about the possibilities app development brings. It is clear there are a number of app developers out there who are already onto it and have managed to secure significant investment to do so. For us to do that would require work of our whole core team which would distract them from providing the service that currently exists.

We need to continue to optimise our social media, our interactions and to continue to build our relationships with other media outlets

That about summarises our progress to date. I'd like to hand over to Jenny who will cover the main points of the January 2021 Year End accounts.

Presentation of Accounts

JB As the charity's year end is 31 January 2021, it is important to remember in the context of some of the comments Simon was making, we are talking a good 10 months in the past.

The report supports many of the things Simon was saying. We can see that membership income went up by about 28%, that is where we were at the end of January 2021. We know that there has been a continued impact of Covid, since then our membership figures have continued to rise, so we will see that again hopefully in next year's accounts as well. Overall income was affected by the fact we had a one off bigger legacy back in the 2020 accounts. When you compare the incomes, you have to remember there was a lump sum legacy in there. In terms of the income, we have control of that and it is increasing. But so are our costs, absolutely for the reasons Simon was talking about.

Our staff costs went up, you can see that we had four employees rather than three and although as Simon said we did have to make some redundancies in that process, the increasing pressure on our services means that we can expect those sorts of costs to stay higher. We need more support to be able to deliver the services that we want to be able to deliver. But overall, staff costs are the major expenditure that we've experienced in this period. However, as you can see, the balance sheet continues to stay healthy. One of the things we have talked about before, while we have to manage the balance between the income and expenditure, it is also important to make sure that we invest in those systems and processes. We need to be willing to take on that risk, in some cases to spend a bit of the balance sheet and not hoard for a rainy day.

Although we are about to go into another difficult winter season, it should be that we can spend some of that money investing in the systems to make the core team's jobs easier.

JB asked if there were any questions regarding the accounts and none were asked.

Voting members were asked to confirm that the accounts were accepted as accurate and true and members agreed unanimously.

Close of AGM

SS closed the formal part of the AGM. Thanked everybody for their attendance and contributions over the previous year. SS passed over to AR for the CEO update.

Update and Future Plans

Simon and Jenny have already covered a number of the things I want to take a bit of time to reiterate a few things. It has been a little over nine months since our last AGM, as the last one was a little delayed. To recap, since March 2020 the operations manager, Sam, and the communications manager, Liz, have been working from home and I've been covering the office. In March 2021 the charity recruited a membership officer Kelsey, who initially worked from home but is now based in the office. We planned to commence a new flexible working pattern, a combination of office and home working from last month. But as Jenny was saying, because of the government and NHS information and predictions for winter

Covid and Flu figures, we have postponed the return to the office until early next year. Obviously, this decision is constantly under review but it is currently working really well.

The team are in regular contact and we have regular virtual meetings. As we all know this has proven to be a challenging year for the core team due to a number of sickness and bereavement absences, which has put pressure on the remaining team members. As Simon mentioned we are still experiencing increase of demand for advice and support compared with the pre pandemic figures. But the demand has slowed from 2020. Our membership stands at just shy of 4000, which represents a huge increase for the charity. We've worked hard to build our membership loyalty and retention. By offering new and existing members special offers and with Liz working really hard in maintaining a high level of communication throughout this time, which our feedback has shown has been really valuable to our members, who have often felt very isolated during this time, we have ensured membership numbers have remained high.

As more people have been home based, with many members still reluctant to venture out, the charity has continued to experience an increase in sales through its online shop.

Moving forward, in addition to the day-to-day challenges of supporting members and the wider IBS community. Leaving no call unanswered, the team are committed to the delivery of the objectives outlined in the strategic plan, with income generation being a priority.

As Simon and Jenny have said, we are pushing forward with the development of the digitisation system and to deliver IBS training packages for clinicians, which will give us an income-generating source. Grants are currently being sourced to assist in system development and it has been anticipated that the charity will be in a position to commence development of modules in the early part of next year.

Whilst we talked about support groups, it's always been something that has been a challenge for us, we are still committed to establishing support groups around the country. It's not a priority at the moment and it's anticipated that this will form phase two of the digitisation programme, so that the possibility will be there to train our support group leaders online and then to support them in establishing, hopefully, a localised online group. So that they will get to know each other, establish links and then have more confidence in meeting face to face and working together, maybe not having a support group leader as such. That will be something to discuss in the latter part of next year.

Charity continues to grow its relationships with pharma and commercial companies. This year we worked with six pharma companies and a range of clinicians with commercial projects, such as a dietitian with a recipe book launch.

In addition to the development of the digitisation programme, the team will work towards growing the charity's membership. We will continue the marketing and communication. The recent months have shown us that overall the charity has been able to hold successful virtual meetings, apart from one or two glitches, illustrating that geography is not the barrier to membership that the board originally believed it was. With this in mind, the Board will be seeking new Trustees, wherever they are based in the UK.

The board of trustees and I continue to strive to find ways in which we can further support our IBS community, increase revenue and ensure the charity's future sustainability.

As in previous years I would like to sincerely thank our medical advisory team, who, in a continuing difficult environment, have supported the charity and its members. Thank you for giving us your time this year and every year.

And finally, I would like to thank my core team of Sam, Liz and Kelsey, in what has been the most difficult of years for me, for their support, understanding and dedication to the charity. We would not be able to deliver the service that we do without them.

Proof that no one has been untouched by the pandemic, but we are always looking to the future and can be proud of what we have achieved over the year.

Close Meeting

SS asked if anyone had any questions, none were raised. **SS** thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was closed.